

Open your prayer books to p. 293, the Renewal of Baptismal Vows. Half way down the page, after the Apostles Creed, the priest asks the people, “Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers? And the people say: “I will, with God’s help.”

*We just read in Acts 2:42; they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

The first disciples after Pentecost, according to Luke, devoted themselves to the same actions that we vow to continue to do in our lives today. The followers of Jesus then and now are no longer hiding behind locked doors in fear. They and we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to go and proclaim all that God has done for us through Jesus Christ. As we say in our Baptismal Vows, we will proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ. What does that look like? Wednesday evening at Bible study the question came up about what made the followers of Jesus different, why did people who had never met Jesus want to become followers of Christ? What did people see in those early disciples that made them want to become a Christian? Esp., since at that time following Jesus meant not following the religion of the culture of Rome. The ‘Son of God’ for Christians was not the Emperor, but Jesus.

These first Christians were still Jewish, but they believed that Jesus was the Messiah the scriptures had been fulfilled! The disciples attended Temple worship (they were still Jews) then they gathered for a meal at home together after the service. The meal of the gathered church was one of celebration and joy. People noticed the joy and the generosity of the gathered church and were attracted to it. What a concept! People gathered for worship then had a meal together afterwards where all were welcome. Those who were considered the poor and the outcast of society were included. Eventually, the Jewish-Christians began meeting in homes for worship as well as the community meal when the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians directs them to wait for all to arrive before beginning the evening meal, followed by the Eucharist. The form of the meal that Paul uses is similar to what we experienced on Maundy Thursday. All are included in the meal and worship, not just a select few. Many of the early disciples were servants and slaves, which is why Paul had to tell the more affluent members to wait for all to arrive!

*Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. (Acts 2:43) Have we had signs and wonders happen among us? Then share those experiences with others in your lives. Proclaim by word and example the Good News of what Christ is doing in our midst! Don’t hide it behind closed doors, the doors of this building or of our hearts. If Jesus is alive in your heart then share that with others. I don’t mean telling people how you are a good Christian, in fact the people in VA Beach who have told me that, they are a good Christian, have then lied and taken money from me. Let people know how to follow Jesus through your actions!*

*All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. (Acts 2:44-45)*

According to Luke, the early church held all things in common; they sold their possessions and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. Jesus during his ministry relied on the help of others, especially the women who followed him from Galilee. We don't live in a utopian world. We don't hold all things in common. We aren't going to sell all our possessions and live together in a commune. The duty of all Christians, according to our catechism is "to follow Christ; to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God." (BCP p. 856) We are to support the work of the church spiritually, physically and financially, as we are able and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We at Good Samaritan, as a family sized church, are able to embody the early church more closely than some of the bigger churches. We know and love each other in all of our strengths and weaknesses. We do support each other in our ministries and our daily lives. Working ecumenically with Enoch Baptist and Western Bayside Community United we are able to reach out to our neighborhood's needs. Our Family Life Center with Enoch will help us expand our ministry to and with our neighborhood.

We live in a culture very much like those early disciples in the *Book of Acts*. Our culture is not Christian. As we discussed Wednesday evening why would anyone want to be a follower of Jesus today? The first disciples knew that God loved them, that God had called them by name and their hearts were open to accept that love. As we heard in the Emmaus story last week, once they recognized the risen Lord in the breaking of the bread they couldn't keep it to themselves, they had to share their joy with others!

As Richard Rohr has written, *Jesus did not come to change the mind of God about humanity (it did not need changing)! Jesus came to change the mind of humanity about God.* Our culture is one of scarcity, advertisements tell us we need more things in life, from cars and cell phones to what pills to take for any ailment. We never have enough, there is always something more that we need, supposedly. And Christianity has not helped by teaching that you are unworthy, that somehow God won't love you. God made you and I in God's image, we have God's Spirit living within us. We are loved by God. God's love is freely given to us, but it is so hard to accept that. We are Christ's Body in our world, just as the first disciples were Christ's Body in their world. God offers us abundance! God also sees every person as Beloved, there is no 'us and them.' We are all one in Christ. Jesus died to show us that no matter what the world can do through violence, cruelty, or through promoting divisions among people, God's love will overcome that violence. Jesus overcame death on a cross to show us not to fear, but to reach out in love to our neighbors, whoever those neighbors may be. We are to care for each other, as he told us in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus healed those he met in his life, he didn't impoverish them to heal them. He ate with those who were the outcasts of society, he offered abundant life free from fear.

Today is the time for us to act as followers of Jesus Christ to persevere in resisting evil and loving your neighbor as yourself, because you are loved by God. Today we, like the first followers of Jesus Christ, are to devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And like them we too are to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ to our world, because

people are seeking what we have in our hearts, the joy of knowing Jesus Christ alive in us. Today, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit we are to go out into the world striving for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being no matter the cost. Because today, we are followers of the Risen Lord and know that the world needs the love and joy that only God through us can offer.